

In the United States Court of Federal Claims
OFFICE OF SPECIAL MASTERS
No. 21-2111V

LUZ AURORA VARGAS DE
ECHAVARRIA

Petitioner,

v.

SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES,

Respondent.

Chief Special Master Corcoran

Filed: November 13, 2023

Paul Adrian Green, Law Office of Paul Green, Pasadena, CA, for Petitioner.

Bridget Corridon, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC, for Respondent.

DECISION ON ATTORNEY'S FEES AND COSTS¹

On October 29, 2021, Luz Aurora Vargas de Echavarria filed a petition for compensation under the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, 42 U.S.C. §300aa-10, *et seq.*² (the "Vaccine Act"). Petitioner alleged that she suffered Guillain Barré syndrome resulting from adverse effects of an influenza vaccine received on October 23, 2020. Petition, ECF No. 1. On June 14, 2023, I issued a decision awarding compensation to Petitioner based on the Respondent's proffer. ECF No. 35.

¹ Because this Decision contains a reasoned explanation for the action taken in this case, it must be made publicly accessible and will be posted on the United States Court of Federal Claims' website, and/or at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/uscourts/national/cofc>, in accordance with the E-Government Act of 2002. 44 U.S.C. § 3501 note (2018) (Federal Management and Promotion of Electronic Government Services). **This means the Decision will be available to anyone with access to the internet.** In accordance with Vaccine Rule 18(b), Petitioner has 14 days to identify and move to redact medical or other information, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy. If, upon review, I agree that the identified material fits within this definition, I will redact such material from public access.

² National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3755. Hereinafter, for ease of citation, all section references to the Vaccine Act will be to the pertinent subparagraph of 42 U.S.C. § 300aa (2018).

Petitioner has now filed a motion for attorney's fees and costs, requesting an award of \$16,635.70 (representing \$16,142.00 in fees and \$493.70 in costs). Petitioner's Application for Fees and Costs filed Aug. 24, 2023, ECF No. 41. In accordance with General Order No. 9, counsel for Petitioner represents that Petitioner incurred no out-of-pocket expenses. *Id.* at 3.

Respondent reacted to the motion on Aug. 25, 2023, reporting that he is satisfied that the statutory requirements for an award of attorney's fees and costs are met in this case, but deferring resolution of the amount to be awarded to my discretion. Respondent's Response to Motion at 2-3, ECF No. 42. Petitioner did not file a reply thereafter.

I have reviewed the billing records submitted with Petitioner's requests and find a reduction in the amount of fees to be awarded appropriate, for the reasons listed below.

ANALYSIS

The Vaccine Act permits an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs. Section 15(e). Counsel must submit fee requests that include contemporaneous and specific billing records indicating the service performed, the number of hours expended on the service, and the name of the person performing the service. See *Savin v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 85 Fed. Cl. 313, 316-18 (2008). Counsel should not include in their fee requests hours that are "excessive, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary." *Saxton v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 3 F.3d 1517, 1521 (Fed. Cir. 1993) (quoting *Hensley v. Eckerhart*, 461 U.S. 424, 434 (1983)). It is "well within the special master's discretion to reduce the hours to a number that, in [her] experience and judgment, [is] reasonable for the work done." *Id.* at 1522. Furthermore, the special master may reduce a fee request *sua sponte*, apart from objections raised by respondent and without providing a petitioner notice and opportunity to respond. See *Sabella v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 86 Fed. Cl. 201, 209 (2009). A special master need not engage in a line-by-line analysis of petitioner's fee application when reducing fees. *Broekelschen v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 102 Fed. Cl. 719, 729 (2011).

The petitioner "bears the burden of establishing the hours expended, the rates charged, and the expenses incurred." *Wasson v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 24 Cl. Ct. 482, 484 (1991). The Petitioner "should present adequate proof [of the attorney's fees and costs sought] at the time of the submission." *Wasson*, 24 Cl. Ct. at 484 n.1. Petitioner's counsel "should make a good faith effort to exclude from a fee request hours that are excessive, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary, just as a lawyer in private

practice ethically is obligated to exclude such hours from his fee submission.” *Hensley*, 461 U.S. at 434.

Petitioner requests compensation for attorney Paul Green at the following rates: \$430 per hour for time billed in 2021; \$440 per hour for time billed in 2022; and \$450 per hour for time billed in 2023. ECF No. 41 at 2. Some of these rates require adjustment.

Attorney Green was previously awarded the rate of \$420 per hour for time billed in 2021, less than what is being requested herein. See *Silva v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 18-1887V, Slip Op. 61, (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Jan. 21, 2022). I agree with the reasoning from this earlier decision and reduce Mr. Green’s rate to be consistent with *Silva*. This results in a reduction of fees to be awarded of **\$155.00**.³ The requested hourly rates for the 2022-23 timeframe, however, are reasonable and shall be awarded herein.

Lastly, Petitioner has provided supporting documentation for all claimed costs. Motion at 33-42. Respondent offered no specific objection to the rates or amounts sought.

The Vaccine Act permits an award of reasonable attorney’s fees and costs for successful claimants. Section 15(e). Accordingly, I hereby GRANT Petitioner’s Motion for attorney’s fees and costs. I award a total of **\$16,480.70** (representing **\$15,987.00** in fees and **\$493.70** in costs) as a lump sum in the form of a check jointly payable to **Petitioner and Petitioner’s counsel, Paul A Green**. In the absence of a timely-filed motion for review (see Appendix B to the Rules of the Court), the Clerk of Court shall enter judgment in accordance with this Decision.⁴

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/Brian H. Corcoran
Brian H. Corcoran
Chief Special Master

³ This amount is calculated as: $(\$430 - \$420 = \$10 \times 15.50) = \155.00

⁴ Pursuant to Vaccine Rule 11(a), the parties may expedite entry of judgment by filing a joint notice renouncing their right to seek review.